

An out-of-state religious group bought 1400 acres close to Eldorado, Texas a couple of years ago. The sect operates without outside contact or issue, distressing citizens of the small ranch and oil town accustomed to neighboring, and to the label "colony" being associated with antbeds.

The ranch lies 18 miles west of Eldorado going straight through the country on horseback. Be hard to ride across nowadays, as the ranches and farms are divided into smaller units than in the old days and gates are locked, which was unheard-of in the 1940s.

Seemed bad timing for a church colony to move to Eldorado. Back when our culture contained a fringe (tight call here) prone to such pastimes as dirt track horse racing, the pitting of game cocks, riverbank dice and card gaming, along with liquid refreshments agreeable to all three sports, it would have been understandable to attract the attention of an entire religious crusade.

But today? Today television, home movies, cell phones and laptop computers hold folks under a spell so blinding and stultifying that it would take a week-long power failure to revive enough misbehavior to write a good sermon, much less found a church.

What brought the ranch's attention to the church colony at Eldorado, however, happened in February. The reason we noticed was that we lacked three heifers being

through calving a hundred young mothers. We had also planned on marking calves in a week.

On the first telephone call of the morning, my helper asked if I'd heard that the new church folks at Eldorado predicted the end of world the next day. I hadn't heard, as the closest TV set is seven miles away behind a locked gate and set too far off the road to eavesdrop or see the screen. However, I told him that when I checked the heifers before daylight, the glow of the streetlights in Eldorado showed no sign of evacuation.

The rural electric cooperative headquarters at Eldorado. REA symbolizes country people. I knew that if the world was going to come to an end, the co-op would need to read the meters ahead of time for fast billing. So I called the boss.

I thought it better to open on a different subject rather than ask directly if he had felt a tremor or seen a strange light in the east. So I asked a question that was plenty important question to me under the circumstances, yet innocuous to him: whether the co-op's maps showed the distance of the ranch house from Eldorado. Figured he might let slip the town's reactions after the morning TV newscast announced the colony's prediction of what could be the biggest electrical shutdown of all time in the shortgrass country — or maybe all over the globe.

A bit curtly, I thought, he denied having such a map. Further, he said he had no idea how far my ranch house was from Eldorado. And to my final question, whether the co-op

supplied the power to the new religious colony, his reply was affirmative, short, and conclusive. Then he hung up.

One day's notice was too late to find help to mark the calves. Had to consider, also, that the closest clinic for the drug to induce labor in the heifers was 35 miles away. I needed to act fast. We'd pulled the last four calves. Be our luck to have to load one for a cesarean just as the world came to an end and closed the roads.

Other fleeting thoughts hit. I wanted to be sure and pay the guy who shod our horses. For certain, I didn't want to beat the old boy who repairs our windmills and pumps. Couldn't remember whether the windmills were turned off or on. Had to suppose there wasn't time to cancel the order for a part for the livestock sprayer. The return fee didn't matter, but I figured sure as hell (pardon "hell"; the threat of world termination leaves a lasting mark) that the supplier was going to be mad if no notification came of refusal.

Go on and laugh. But being 18 miles away from the very core of a prophesy of doom takes away the humor of Chicken Little bouncing a grave off her noggin. Every time the fan motor started on the furnace in the attic or a high pressure knock hit the water line, the residual noise sounded like a bugler playing taps. The mere thought of old Gabriel and his horn started a nerve trembling knee jerk so severe, the palsy rolled my pants leg a foot above my boot tops.

It ended — or didn't end, meaning the world. I am thankful. Shortgrassers are good at waiting for catastrophes to happen or get over with, but it sure would have hit us hard not to finish calving those heifers, as all three needed help.